



Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the primary function of a state-level immunization program?

The New Hampshire Immunization Programs provide, for free, all necessary childhood vaccines to all licensed vaccine health care providers in the state. Making vaccines easily available to all children, regardless of insurance status, has contributed to high immunization rates. In addition, the State Immunization Program works with health care providers and parents to educate them on the benefits of immunization and to provide them with feedback and assistance on what they can do to improve vaccine coverage.

Our main source of funding is from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). However, we are able to offer such a large array of vaccines and achieve such high immunization rates in part because of the generous funding we receive from the managed care organizations of our state.

2. If New Hampshire has such high immunization rates for two year olds, why are we so concerned about our children's vaccine status?

Even with high rates, 10%-15% of our 2-year-olds are under-immunized, making them vulnerable to deadly diseases. Adult immunization rates are even worse, and pose a real threat to public health.

3. Since we know that immunizations are the best investment in our health, why is it so difficult for patients to achieve full immunization status?

Research shows that a lack of information is the major reason for under-immunization. The current childhood vaccine schedule is complex and requires at least 11 vaccines over a minimum of five visits during the first two years of a child's life. Confusion about this complex schedule leads to information gaps and under-immunization. For instance:

- health care providers often overestimate the percentage of their patients that is fully immunized;
- parents often do not know their child's immunization status; and adults don't even realize that they still need immunizations;
- most physicians do not remind their patients when an immunization appointment is due or missed.

4. If we're still managing to get high immunization rates, they why can't we just continue that same strategy?

Six years ago about 4 out of 10 New Hampshire two-year-olds were lacking vaccines against deadly diseases. Currently, about 1 out of 10 two-year-olds are under-vaccinated. Achieving these highest in the nation immunization rates took enormous personnel and financial resources. To maintain these rates using the current system will take even more resources than available. Research shows we are at the limits of how much higher these efforts can take us.

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5. How then does an immunization information system address the strategies necessary to achieve and maintain high immunization rates?

Research from the CDC shows that in order to increase and maintain high immunization rates, an immunization information system must be developed. These systems fill the information gaps needed to sustain high immunization coverage by:

- maintaining databases that enroll children at birth and store information on each immunization encounter;
- consolidating immunization records that have been scattered among offices, allowing a valid assessment of a patient's immunization status based on complete, accurate data;
- providing reminders for those children who are due or overdue for vaccines;
- providing physician-based coverage rates and other feedback to providers in order to encourage the administration of immunizations at every opportunity;
- providing community-based coverage estimates to more effectively target public health interventions at areas of high risk.

6. What has our approach been to developing this system?

We have been especially concerned that we develop an immunization information system that is of greater use to our providers, and therefore to the children of New Hampshire. Because of this goal, our design team not only included health care providers, but we also conducted focus groups for physicians, office nurses, office managers, consumers, health insurers, hospital personnel, and policy makers. The result is the design of ImmPact, the first of its kind in the nation with advances which we believe will highly and positively impact the health of our citizens.

7. Why is ImmPact the first system of its kind in the entire country?

In creating ImmPact, we tried very hard to include in both our design team and in our numerous focus groups as many potential users, beneficiaries and opponents as possible. As a result, ImmPact has many unique features and is the first of its kind in the country for several reasons:

- It is the first immunization information system to provide such a large array of functions
- It is the first to use web-based technology - this design element resulted from the security and privacy concerns brought to us about traditional front-end systems, where the data kept on a local workstation could be easily exploited.
- The web-based technology of ImmPact makes our system more secure and allows for more flexibility and confidentiality than front-end systems
- ImmPact is the first to provide an immunization information system to all private and public health care providers - this resulted from parents who wanted the information available, no matter what type of provider they chose for their child
- ImmPact is the first system to serve more than one state: Maine's Bureau of Health is the lead agency in partnership with New Hampshire - this allowed us to pool and conserve limited resources
- ImmPact is the first system to serve the immunization needs of adults

8. What are some of ImmPact's most important features and practical benefits?

- ImmPact provides information to health care providers on the immunization status of the patients they care for

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- ImmPact keeps track of the amount and type of vaccines providers are using, as well as orders and ships new vaccine supplies to them
- ImmPact allows providers to easily find out which patients in their practice are due for vaccines, as well as those who are overdue
- Helps public health officials prevent and control disease outbreaks
- Analyzes immunization rates at the provider and community level, enabling us to more effectively target our outreach efforts

9. How have the highest standards of protection of confidentiality and security been incorporated into this powerful web-based system?

Zita Lazzarini, an attorney specializing in medical confidentiality at Harvard School of Public Health, and Gail Horlick, an attorney with the same expertise at CDC, were both consulted throughout the design and development phases of ImmPact. There are many mechanisms in place to address these issues in ImmPact.

10. Is it possible for patients to opt out of enrollment in ImmPact?

Parents will be given information on ImmPact prior to their first immunization visit at their provider's office. They then have the option to not participate in ImmPact. A form documenting that option will be collected, but only to ensure that the patient is not included by other providers.

11. Does the implementation of ImmPact mean that children will now be required to be immunized?

No. The laws on the requirements of immunization will remain the same. Patients may still decide not to get immunized. However, the most common reasons why patients are missing vaccines are because either their parents or physicians are unaware of their under-immunized status, since record-keeping can be so difficult. ImmPact will assist those families. For those patients who choose not to immunize, ImmPact will allow that wish to be communicated to other health care providers. It will also allow physicians to work with these patients more quickly in the event of a disease outbreak so that they can be protected.

12. Can just any health care provider have access to ImmPact and see information about a patient?

No. Access to information in ImmPact is limited by the need to know. Health care providers must sign a confidentiality agreement before getting their own user account. Even then, only those providers who are listed as the patient's primary care provider can access all the identifying information on a patient. Other health care providers must enter more authenticating information to exactly identify the patient in order to retrieve only the immunization status of the patients. They cannot view any other information. This ensures that the patient gets the proper medical care if needed, but also protects privacy.

13. What equipment will be required in physician's offices?

Like other information systems, ImmPact will require a computer with a modem. Although we cannot provide this equipment, most offices surveyed have them. Because ImmPact is web-based, the only software required is either Netscape or Internet Explorer; often available for free from the internet and internet service providers.

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14. How much does it cost to get ImmPact?

ImmPact itself is FREE. However, ImmPact will require offices to have an internet service provider. Most places in the state now have local internet services available for a flat rate of about \$20 per month.

15. How easy is it to use ImmPact?

We have worked hard to make ImmPact as user-friendly as possible. We have consulted software development experts and worked with several users to make it as easy as possible.

16. If I'm a patient, how can I join ImmPact?

Let your health care provider know that you'd like to have your immunization information stored in ImmPact. If your health care provider is a part of ImmPact, they will then be able to access your information whenever you request it.

17. If I'm a health care provider, how can I join ImmPact?

Contact the New Hampshire Immunization Program for additional information.